

## BUSINESS CARD SYSTEMS

Field Of The Invention

5 The present invention relates to a novel form of business card as well as novel systems for implementing, using and transmitting said business card. More particularly, the present invention relates to a business card which has imprinted thereon a personal identification code, which, when input into a network by the receiver of the card of the present invention, returns the contact information of the card giver.

Background Of The Invention

10 It has long been a common practice for people, particularly in the business community, to carry paper-stock cards on which was imprinted certain contact information. Such cards have been referred to as business cards or visit cards. As the business world has moved into a state where personal contact is increasingly complemented by an electronic enhancement, there has been a noticeable shift of reliance on forms of personal contact information managers. Most business people now maintain an arsenal of a combination of a plurality of devices including e-mail, paper business cards, personal data assistants (PDAs) for exchanging such contact information. For example, one PDA may be used to beam an  
15 electronic business card directly into an adjacent PDA using infrared ports. However old-fashioned they may seem, paper business cards are still extremely useful and cannot quite be replaced due to their simplicity and ease of availability and transfer.

20 However, many complex solutions have been sought for ways to automate the process of transferring the information on a paper business card into the electronic form for use in computers and PDAs. These methods can be quite cumbersome, for example, one requiring small business card-sized scanners which are hard-wire linked to a computer, and which perform an OCR (optical character recognition) operation on the card and then might have complex software for transferring the information into the appropriate fields of a contact manager database, such as Microsoft Corp.'s Outlook Contacts, Symantec's Act! and  
25 others.  
30

Additionally, once the information has been transferred by the receiver into his contact manager, the card giver has [a] no way of knowing to whom he gave his card (unless he wrote down the name and contact information of each receiver; [b] he has no way of advising all of the card recipient's if there is a change in the information; and [c] nor can he tailor the content of each card to the type of recipient to, for  
5 example, provide certain information on the business card to certain recipients and more in-depth information to others.

In the past, one electronic way to update card recipients of changes, was to keep an independent record in one's own e-mail program of who received what and then do a broadcast e-mail to everyone on the list  
10 of the change in the contact information. Quite a cumbersome method and undoubtedly bothersome to those recipient's who don't want the information to begin with.

Considering the limited amount of information typically contained in a business card, its utility is amazingly broad. In fact, it is a common practice for professionals in a variety of disciplines to routinely  
15 enter the information in business cards into their address databases for subsequent reference, and/or for mailing of announcements, seasonal greeting cards etc.

Thus, it is desirable to be able to model business card exchanges for electronic network entry. It is further desirable to be able to capture the information in the exchanged "business cards" for subsequent  
20 retrieval. As will be disclosed in more detail below, the method and apparatus of the present invention achieves these and other desirable results.

For a better understanding of the state of the art prior to the invention hereof, reference may be had to US Patent No. 5,940,595 and the related patents, applications and references cited therein, none of which  
25 are believed to address the problems or solutions thereto herein proposed.

#### Objects And Summary Of The Invention

It is an object of the present invention to provide a business card system which comprises the best  
30 features of traditional printed hard copy business cards printed on paper stock with the ease.

convenience and added utility of electronic or computer-based contact managers and network based e-mail capabilities.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a paper or plastic business card for subscribers (card givers), the details of which can be automatically downloaded into the card receiver's electronic database by simply accessing the business card database via the Internet and entering a unique code imprinted on the card.

It is still a further object of the present invention to allow tiered levels of information to be available to select receivers of the card, enabling selective information access, the selection being at the will of the subscriber (card giver).

It is a further object of the present invention to track and record the origination details of receivers, i.e. those who received a business card and are requesting that the information be downloaded to their computers or personal digital assistants or other contact manager.

It is yet a further object of the present invention to utilize the recorded origination information about the receivers to enable the subscriber to notify all those who have downloaded his information about changes to the information in the personal details file.

These objects as well as others not specifically enumerated herein are achieved by the present invention in which a card giver, hereinafter a subscriber, registers to participate with the Administrator of the Business Card Database, either via electronic registration over a computer network or by fax, phone or mail registration.

On an Internet-accessible server computer, Database Administrator creates a file Account for use exclusively by the subscriber. The account is assigned or linked with a username and password; and is also assigned a unique code – either generated by a code generating algorithm, or it could be generated randomly or simply consist of a combination of Subscriber-specific parameters such as subscriber's country telephone code and local telephone number.

In conjunction with setting up the Internet-accessible database file, a quantity of cards made of paper stock or imprintable plastic such as those known to be used as calling cards or business cards are imprinted with the unique code, and/or alternatively with other selected details about the Subscriber.

- 5 In parallel with printing and distribution of the imprinted cards, the subscriber uses a computer having access to the Internet in order to access the Database via the Web site of the Database Administrator using his username and password where instructed in order to access his Account file. The subscriber is then prompted to input or edit his basic personal data, such as name, address, phone numbers, facsimile numbers. The subscriber could also create put in more detailed information or information specially
- 10 intended for access by special clients. This can be accomplished by making sub-boxes or granting access to tiered levels of information either by giving received additional access code or in answer to special request of the client (see below).

Imprinted cards are distributed to potential customers, clients, etc. (hereinafter "Receivers") during the

15 normal course of business or social life.

Receiver then accesses Database via a remote computer which is networked to the Database computer.

- Receiver is offered option to either sign in (become a new Subscriber) or to input the unique code
- 20 provided on the Subscriber's card in order to access, record and optionally download Subscriber's information.

#### Options

- Format of Downloaded Information - Receiver can be given options for different computer-readable
- 25 formats for download to take place, i.e. in a format readable by various Personal Digital Assistants, Personal Computer format, database formats, contact manager software applications, etc.

- Additional Information - Receiver might wish to request additional information in which case Receiver activates "button" on computer screen which causes request for additional information to be generated
- 30 and passed to Subscriber. Subscriber then can decide to grant to receiver access to a higher tier where

requested information is already contained in database or Subscriber can send the requested information directly to Receiver by any means, including electronic via electronic mail, fax, telephone, mail.

Optionally, Receiver might wish additional information and have been provided by Subscriber with optional additional access code, in which case Receiver may input additional access code and download of additional information begins.

Receivers Database - Program is designed to record where inquiries are originating from and thus cause to be compiled a listing or database of Receivers (locations from which info requests were made).

Alternatively, the program may simply include an authorization applet which is downloaded to a Receiver and when activated offers to include Receiver on a list of those desiring to be notified when the personal details of the Subscriber are changed. If the Receiver accepts the offer, then the applet generates an e-mail type form for completion by the Receiver and transmission back to the server. The e-mail type form would either ask receiver to indicate where such notice should be sent or could be programmed to automatically detect Receiver's e-mail program and get such information from Receiver's Internet Browser settings.

This Receivers Database may be used to inform all Receivers when Subscriber has changed any personal data contained in his record.

Notice may optionally simply indicate that change has occurred and invite Receiver to revisit the Subscriber Database to download the amended file.

Additionally, notice could advise receiver of the nature of the change in the file.

As a further option, the notice could be an a small program which enquires whether Receiver wants to updated information downloaded to PC or PDA and if activated, enquires as to which format information should be retrieved in and then it retrieves and downloads the information to receiver's computer as requested.

Brief Description Of The Drawings

The detailed description which follows will be est understood with reference to the drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is an exemplary embodiment of a registration display for enrolling in an electronic business card program in accordance with the present invention;

5

FIG. 2 is an exemplary embodiment of an acknowledgement transmitted to the client computer of a user who has enrolled in the electronic business card program in accordance with the present invention;

10

FIG. 3 is an exemplary embodiment of a search engine input/output screen for use with the electronic business card program in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 4 is an exemplary embodiment of an import utility screen for use with the electronic business card program in accordance with the present invention; and

15

FIG. 5 is an exemplary embodiment of a reporting screen for use with the electronic business card program in accordance with the present invention.

Detailed Description Of Exemplary Embodiments

An exemplary embodiment of the present invention is described hereinbelow, however it should be recognized that the scope of the invention is not limited by the description of the exemplary  
5 embodiment and is only limited by the scope of the claims which follow. It is anticipated that one of skill in the art can make many variations and modifications to the present invention without departing from the scope or spirit of the claimed invention.

- 10 1) A subscriber, having a client device such as a PC, WAP phone or PDA, which has access to the Internet and is provided with a Web browser, registers with a Database Administrator, either via electronic registration over a computer network or by fax, phone or mail registration.
- a) On an Internet-accessible server computer, Database Administrator creates a file Account for use exclusively by Subscriber;
- b) Account is assigned or linked with a username and password which Subscriber can use to  
15 enter and maintain the personal details of the record associated with the Account ; and
- c) Account and the personal details therein are also associated with and assigned a unique personal identification code – either generated by a code generating algorithm, or it could be generated randomly or simply consist of a combination of Subscriber-specific parameters such as subscriber's country telephone code and local telephone number.
- 20 2) A quantity of cards made of paper stock or imprintable plastic such as those known to be used as calling cards or business cards are imprinted with the unique personal identification code, and/or alternatively with other selected details about the Subscriber. The cards may be of any size similar to that of known business cards, or variations thereon, as long as the cards can be conveniently carried  
25 by subscriber and distributed to receivers. Typical dimensions of such cards are 2-1/2 inches in height by 3-1/2 inches in length.
- 3) The Subscriber then uses a computer having access to the Internet in order to access the Database via the Web site of the Database Administrator.
- 30 a) Subscriber inputs username and password where instructed in order to access his Account file.

- b) Subscriber is then prompted to input or edit basic personal data, such as name, address, phone numbers, facsimile numbers.
- c) Subscriber could also put in more detailed information or information specially intended for access by special clients. This can be accomplished by making sub-boxes or granting access to tiered levels of information either by giving Receiver additional access code or in answer to special request of the client (see below).
- 4) Imprinted Cards are distributed to potential customers, clients, etc. (hereinafter "Receivers") during the normal course of business or social life.
- 5) Receiver then accesses Database via a remote computer which is networked to the Database computer.
- 6) Receiver is offered option to either sign in (become a new Subscriber) or to input the unique code provided on the Subscriber's card in order to access, record and optionally download Subscriber's information.
- 7) Options
- a) Format of Downloaded Information - Receiver can be given options for different computer-readable formats for download to take place, i.e. in a format readable by various Personal Digital Assistants, Personal Computer format, database formats, contact manager software applications, etc.
- b) Additional Information - Receiver might wish to request additional information in which case Receiver activates "button" on computer screen which causes request for additional information to be generated and passed to Subscriber. Subscriber then can decide to grant to receiver access to a higher tier where requested information is already contained in database or Subscriber can send the requested information directly to Receiver by any means, including electronic via electronic mail, fax, telephone, mail.
- i) Optionally, Receiver might wish additional information and have been provided by Subscriber with optional additional access code or variation on the unique personal



identification code, in which case Receiver may input additional access code and download of additional information begins.

- 5 c) Receivers Database - Program is designed to record where inquiries are originating from and thus cause to be compiled a listing or database of Receivers (locations from which info requests were made).

- i) This Receivers Database may be used to inform all Receivers when Subscriber has changed any personal data contained in his record.
- 10 ii) Notice may optionally simply indicate that change has occurred and invite Receiver to revisit the Subscriber Database to download the amended file.
- iii) Additionally, notice could advise receiver of the nature of the change in the file.
- iv) As a further option, the notice could be a small program which enquires whether Receiver wants to updated information downloaded to PC or PDA and if activated, enquires as to which format information should be retrieved in and then it retrieves and downloads the information to receiver's computer as requested.